



A REAL SPACEMAN

Meet astronaut Mike Massimino,
a veteran of two space-shuttle missions.

BY KIM FERNANDEZ

Astronauts Mike Massimino and Michael Good (background) work on upgrading the Hubble Space Telescope during a spacewalk outside the space shuttle Atlantis.

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF NASA



The first time Mike Massimino

stepped outside the space shuttle for a spacewalk and looked through the vastness down at his home planet, he thought he must be seeing Earth the way it's seen in heaven.

Then he changed his mind—it was so unbelievably beautiful, he thought he must be looking at heaven itself.

His first trip to space was a dream come true, and his second was even better. "I knew what to expect and how to get everything done, so I had more time to just enjoy it," he says. "I was 6 years old when people first walked on the moon, and that became a dream of mine."

Aiming High

Massimino grew up in Long Island, N.Y. He studied engineering in college, eventually earning an advanced degree in mechanical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1992. Four years later, NASA accepted him as an astronaut candidate.

"I learned to work really hard and not give up," he says. "I applied four times to become an astronaut before I was selected. Sometimes it takes a lot of years, and you have to keep trying."

Even now, with two shuttle missions and several spacewalks under his belt, the hard work continues.

"We're always training," he says. "We fly space simulators and practice different aspects of missions." Massimino's space missions, in 2002 and 2009, involved updating and repairing the Hubble Space Telescope. With all the hard work comes learning, and Massimino says that's one of the best parts of his very cool job.

"No two days are ever the same," he

says. "In a typical week, I'll put a space-suit on and then go down to the pool to learn about new hardware, and then I'll go scuba diving. [Astronauts train in the water to simulate the zero-gravity conditions of space.] Then I'll get into a suit for a whole day and practice a spacewalk. It's pretty cool—one week of my job probably fills up two years of other jobs with all the learning."

When he's not preparing for a mission of his own, Massimino provides ground support for astronauts who are out in space, communicating with them from NASA's headquarters in Houston and helping coordinate their mission activities to keep everything running smoothly. Because of that, he has to know everything he can about every mission.

Being Prepared

Practice is essential to being a good astronaut. There is no room for mistakes on a crowded space shuttle. Massimino says Scouting, with its foundation of exploration and achievement, was great background to his acceptance into the astronaut corps.

If you dream of following him into space, Massimino suggests: "Find something you really love. Look at the backgrounds of the different astronauts. I've flown with engineers, an oceanographer, a geologist, a veterinarian. It's really varied."

"Concentrate in a technical area. Any kind of science, engineering or math is good. And then work really hard and don't give up." ✦

EATING IN SPACE IS ITS OWN ADVENTURE

Food that tastes fine on Earth can become a little bland in zero gravity.

"We get a lot of our taste from our sense of smell," astronaut Mike Massimino explains. "The first couple of days in space, you're a little stuffed up—the fluid in your body isn't being held down by gravity, and your head gets stuffy. So things don't have much flavor."

What's an astronaut to do?

"We like to take Tabasco or hot sauce with us to spice it up a little bit."

They also bring fresh fruit and veggies along, plus treats such as brownies, cookies and candy.

"We like the shrimp cocktail because it comes with a spicy horseradish sauce," he says. "We have really good food: Chinese food, spicy chicken, fajitas, steak, hamburger, lasagna. And the mac and cheese is pretty awesome."



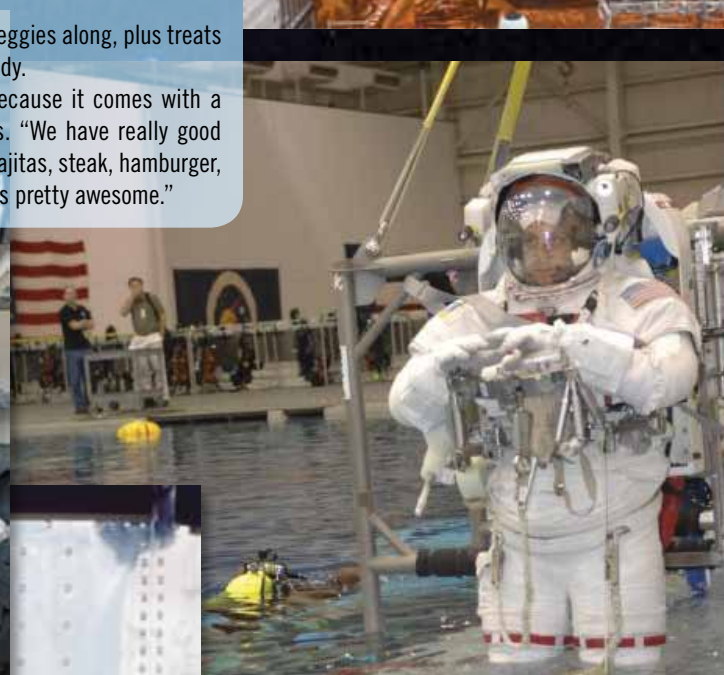
JOB FACTS: ASTRONAUT

JOB OUTLOOK: Astronaut Mike Massimino says there will always be a demand for well-educated workers in the astronaut corps as space exploration grows. But working hard is a must: About 4,000 people apply for about 20 jobs every two years.

EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE: Mission specialists and pilots should have a college degree in engineering, science or math and at least three years of work experience in those areas. A master's degree or higher is desirable. Pilots need at least 1,000 hours of jet aircraft experience and excellent vision. All astronauts need to be in great physical shape.

SALARY: Astronaut candidates make between \$65,140 and \$100,701 per year and are paid according to the federal government pay scale.

MORE INFO: boyslife.org/links/astronaut



Massimino trains for zero-gravity missions in the waters of the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory near NASA's Johnson Space Center. To left and clockwise: working on the Hubble telescope in the cargo bay of the space shuttle Columbia in 2002. Looking over procedures checklists onboard Atlantis. Carrying out more work on Hubble, this time with Atlantis in 2009.

TWEETING FROM ORBIT

In June 2009, Mike Massimino became the first astronaut to send Twitter updates from space, while flying aboard STS-125 Atlantis on the final space-shuttle mission to the Hubble Space Telescope.

His first tweet from space came soon after settling into orbit: "From orbit: Launch was awesome!! I am feeling great, working hard, & enjoying the magnificent views, the adventure of a lifetime has begun!"

You can follow Massimino on Twitter, a free online messaging system, by searching for Astro_Mike. (And don't miss BL's own Twitter feed: boyslife.org.)



SEE VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS FROM MASSIMINO'S ATLANTIS MISSION AT boyslife.org/shuttlevideo